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ABSTRACT

Maltese and English are used as media of instruction across the curriculum in Maltese schools. It has been observed that both languages are normally used within any one lesson and, as is here illustrated by a continuum of crosslinguistic influence, they are mixed in complex ways. As within Maltese society at large, a new variety called Mixed Maltese English has emerged and is being used as a medium of instruction. This presents language teachers and language planners with a number of problems, some of which are identified at the end of the article. (Contains 22 references.) (Author)

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CROSSLINGUISTIC INFLUENCE IN A BILINGUAL CLASSROOM: THE EXAMPLE OF MALTESE AND ENGLISH

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Abstract

Maltese and English are used as media of instruction across the curriculum in Maltese schools. It has been observed that both languages are normally used within any one lesson and, as is here illustrated by a continuum of crosslinguistic influence, they are mixed in complex ways. As within Maltese society at large, a new variety called Mixed Maltese English has emerged and is being used as a medium of instruction. This presents language teachers and language planners with a number of problems, some of which are identified at the end of the article.

1. Bilingualism in Malta

Maltese is the national language of the Republic of Malta and is used for official and administrative purposes on the islands, at the Law Courts, in church services and other religious celebrations, and in national and cultural activities. It is the mother-tongue of the majority of the population and for these people it also serves the functions of communication within the family, circles of friends and other social activities.

English shares an official status together with Maltese and is used for educational purposes, for business and other written correspondence, for international communication and it also serves a very important function in a major local industry - that of tourism. For a few people it is their first language, while for others it shares equal native language status with Maltese, as some families use both languages at home.

Thus, Maltese and English come together within the Maltese speech community at two levels:

(i) at the level of the bilingual individual who learns and uses both languages from childhood;

(ii) at the societal level each language is used for different purposes - although sometimes there is an overlap when both are used in the same situations, as in the classroom.

The variety of English spoken in Malta has been described by Broughton (1976) as Maltese English and is set forth by him as a realistic goal to aim for in the teaching of English in Malta. However, Borg (1980) notes that when Maltese speakers interact in English, sometimes their utterances contain both Maltese English and Maltese words and phrases. In the Maltese bilingual context there is frequent interchange in the use of Maltese and English and the two languages seem to converge to form what has been termed Mixed Maltese English (Borg, 1980).

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From a linguistic point of view, Mixed Maltese English cannot be considered a homogeneous and discrete variety; rather, it is realized by a continuum of speech styles, characterized at one end by a minimum of interference from Maltese and at the other end by an ever increasing influence of the mother-tongue (Borg, 1980, 1988).

Although this variation in language use within Maltese society has been observed (mostly in informal gatherings and also in semi-formal situations such as discussions on the local radio), these new varieties have not yet been described. Language use in the classroom has not been investigated either. For these reasons, the work of which this paper is a fragment tries to answer the questions as to (1) whether, and (2) in what ways Maltese and English operate as media of instruction in Maltese classrooms.

2. The Maltese bilingual classroom

There is no written policy or statement about the use of any language as medium of instruction within the Maltese educational system. For everyday written work, the language of the textbook and of the examination is used. For example, the textbooks and examination papers for Maltese, Religion, Social Studies and Maltese History are in Maltese, while for all the other subjects English is used (except for the teaching of other foreign languages where the language taught is emphasized as medium).

In a preliminary attempt to gather data from the classrooms themselves about the use of two languages as media of instruction, a number of lessons across levels, schools and subjects were observed and tape/video recorded.

From this data it appears that both Maltese and English are generally used within any one lesson. For example, in those subjects where written work is done in Maltese, sometimes both teachers and pupils resort to English in spoken language to express a feeling or to explain an idea. During one observed social studies lesson in Maltese, about the Maltese natural environment, two poems in English, relevant to the topic, were read out and explained. During the other lessons where English is the written medium, spoken interaction both between teacher and class, and among pupils themselves in group work, is commonly carried out in Maltese.

On closer inspection of the lesson transcripts, a more complex picture of the use of the two languages emerges. It seems that the frequent interchange in the use of Maltese and English in the classroom, as within Maltese society at large, has brought about the widespread use of a Mixed Maltese English variety. As I shall try to illustrate with a continuum of crosslinguistic influence, based on lesson transcript data, the situation cannot be merely described in terms of borrowing and code-switching because within any one utterance Maltese bilingual speakers make use of a range of different elements from both languages at the same time (see lesson transcript below as an example).

3. Crosslinguistic influence

Kellerman and Sharwood Smith (1986) introduce the term *crosslinguistic influence* to describe the interplay between earlier and later acquired languages. It is a neutral term which subsumes under one heading such phenomena as transfer, interference, avoidance, borrowing and language loss. In fact, the term could be extended to include the whole range of phenomena resulting from language contact, from interlanguages at the level of the individual at one end of the scale, to the formation of pidgins and creoles at the societal level at the other end.

I prefer to use the term *crosslinguistic influence* as a general term to explain the phenomena observable within the Maltese bilingual classroom (and possibly extend it to similar phenomena observable within the societal context) for the following reasons:

(a) It is a more neutral term than *borrowing* and *code-switching*. As Cassano (1977:150) points out, the choice of the term borrowing is not a very happy one since in language interchange, borrowing (and lending?) have very little in common with the commercial acts of which they are metaphorical extensions. It is language speakers and not languages that "borrow" terms from another language; the language from which the "borrowing" has taken place loses nothing; and the "borrowing" language does not return the "borrowed items"!

(b) Secondly, most definitions of borrowing (e.g. Hudson 1980:58; Mackey 1968:569; Haugen 1972:81) assume that it is one language which influences another. According to the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, *borrowing* refers to 'a word or phrase which has been taken from one language and used in another language'(Richards, J. et al. 1985).

However, when languages come in contact at the societal level, the influence is not one-sided, since both of them influence the other. For example, Py (1986) gives examples of language attrition in the native language of Spanish migrant workers in Switzerland as a result of their learning and interacting in a second language. Rouchdy (1978) describes an immigrant Arabic community in the United States of America and reports that she observed interferences, or crosslinguistic influence, not only from English (in Bloomfield's (1933) sense majority/dominant) to Arabic (minority/subordinate), but also from Arabic to English although to a smaller degree.

In fact, although both languages influence each other, their effect is not necessarily balanced or symmetrical. Burling (1970:169) explains that this is so because two languages rarely meet on equal terms, due to the relative social positions of the speakers of each language, or the attitudes of the community towards each language. For these reasons the two languages can be expected to undergo a different type of influence.

From the Maltese data it appears that, for example, the influence of Maltese on English is very strong at the phonological level, while the influence of English on Maltese takes place more commonly at the lexical level (see Figure 1). These inferences require further analyses and investigation into possible explanations.

(c) Mackey (1968: 569) distinguishes between *interference*, i.e. the use of features belonging to one language while speaking or writing in another, and *borrowing*, when features of one language are used as if they were part of the other and are used by monolingual speakers who may know nothing of the language from which such features originated. In the Maltese context this criterion does not hold very well because all Maltese speakers could be described as bilingual to varying degrees, and therefore the criterion of use of items by monolinguals as a definition of borrowing does not apply.

In order to distinguish between the wholly and partially assimilated items in Haugen's (1956) terms, I have used the criterion of orthography. Thus, words that originated from English and which are now written using Maltese orthography are considered to be wholly assimilated, while those items for which English orthography is still used are considered to be only partially assimilated.

(d) Other attempts have been made by various linguists to provide definitions of *interference*, *mixed-speech*, and *borrowing* in order to differentiate between them

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(e.g. Ure, 1974: 222; Hudson, 1980: 58). However, in the speech of bilingual, at least when they interact amongst themselves, these phenomena could be seen as occurring on a continuum and a clear demarcation between them is not always possible. As can be observed from the Maltese English data, crosslinguistic influence is a more complex phenomenon than the simple "borrowing" of items from one language to another or of switching from one code to another.

4. Continuum of crosslinguistic influence

Figure 1 represents the continuum of crosslinguistic influence between Maltese and English, which we will be illustrating in this section; it ranges from small scale borrowing of lexical items from English at one end, through different examples of code-switching, to Maltese influence on spoken English at the other.

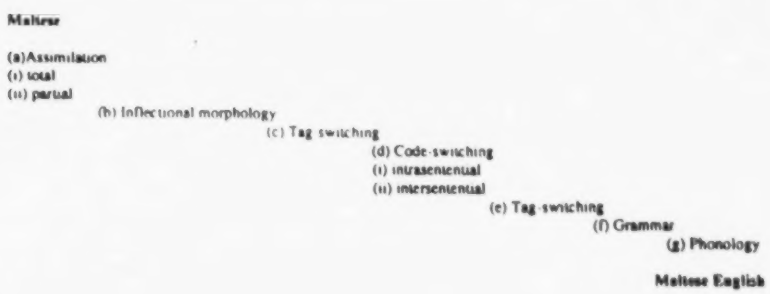

Fig. 1 Continuum of Maltese/English crosslinguistic influence

The grading of types of crosslinguistic influence is not so neatly staged in real language use (as can be seen from the extract below). The aim of the scale is to provide a general picture of crosslinguistic influence occurring between Maltese and English, as observed in a sample of classroom discourse.

The following is an extract from a home-economics lesson transcript[1] in which most of the different categories identified in Figure 1 are found. It is quite a typical extract (although at this stage statistics are not available), and it gives an idea of Mixed Maltese English. The letters in bold within brackets at the end of some utterances refer to the categories in Figure 1.

T: it shrinks - ok igifieri - jew drapp li jixtorob - meta nghidu it shrinks right - hm - is - not washed - or else material which is - hm - delicate jew inkella jigrilu **(d,i)** - xi haga fil-machine perezempju bhal - l-isuede - right **(e)** suede **(a,ii)** jekk you know what suede is eh I showed you a picture of it - suede jekk nahsluh jibda jittebba - allura that we don't wash **(d,i)** - ikollok - ikollkom - fuq il-care label - hm - marka bhal din - right **(e)** - now - this is for washing ++ *(writes on B/B)* ++ issa - imbaghad there are these two symbols ++ voldieri + there are these two symbols + ghandkom ideja ghal x'hiex inhuma dawn is-symbols - ghalfejn? **(d,ii)**

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Ps: bleach

T: very good - bleach - one of them - right - one of them - we can bleach **(g)** + + *(writes on B/B)* + + and this one + + we do not bleach + + *(writes on B/B)* + + now - what types of material can we bleach? **(g)**

P: cotton

T: cotton + Marica

P: ga nsejt

T: ga nsejt int + hm ovvjament - ipprova ahseb pero + ipprova ahseb + x'tipi - illi perezempju - libsa bhal tieghi din nista' nibblicjaha? **(b)**

P: le

T: le ghal x'hiex?

P: ghax tmur il-kulur

T: ghax imur il-kulur - igifieri - it is simple - I mean il-hwejjeg li huma - li ghandhom il-kulur fihom you can't bleach it bleach them ok ghaliex il- kulur - imur - **(d,il,i)**....

Translation

T: it shrinks ok that means either material which shrinks when we say it shrinks right hm is not washed or else material which is hm delicate or else that something happens to it in the machine for example like suede right suede you know what suede is eh I showed you a picture of it suede if it is washed gets stained so that we don't wash because it says on the care label you have hm a sign like this right now this is for washing *(writes on B/B)* now then there are these two symbols I mean there are these two symbols have you any ideas what these symbols stand for?

Ps: bleach

T: very good bleach one of them right one of them we can bleach and this one we do not bleach now what types of material can we bleach?

P: cotton

T: cotton Marica

P: I forgot

T: you've forgotten already obviously try to think that for example a dress like mine can I bleach it?

P: no

T: no why not?

P: because it loses colour

T: because it loses colour that means it is simple I mean coloured clothes you can't bleach them ok because they lose colour.

4.1 English influence on Maltese

(a) Assimilation

Haugen (1956) draws two classifications on the basis of degree or manner of integration of a particular element. The first one is a phonemic classification where elements can be wholly or partially assimilated or unassimilated when there is no adaptation to the phonology of the recipient language.

It is difficult to find examples of English linguistic items used by Maltese speakers that have not in some way or other been adapted to the phonology of Maltese. The following are some examples of wholly and partially assimilated elements.

Examples of wholly assimilated items:[2]

kuker	/ku:ker/	*cooker*
kejk	/kejk/	*cake*
Amerka	/amerka/	*America*

Examples of partially assimilated items:

structure	/straktʃer/	*structure*
function	/fankʃin/	*function*
triangle	/trajengil/	*triangle*
symbols	/simbils/	*symbols*
shrinks	/ʃrinks/	*shrinks*

On the morphemic level there can be total substitution as in *loan translation*, also known as *loan shift* or *calque* when morphemic substitution occurs without any importation from the donor language; *loanblends* when there is partial substitution, or *loanword* when there is no morphemic substitution.

Loanwords seem to be the most common examples in Maltese as in the examples above, and they are either partially or wholly assimilated.

Examples of loan shift are found in Maltese English as in the expression "things that run" for "things that normally happen", but I have not yet come across other examples in classroom data. Loanblends in Maltese are similar to the inflectional morphology examples below.

(b) Inflectional morphology

Hudson (1980: 60) gives the example of inflectional morphology as a kind of crosslinguistic influence. There are many examples of this kind of language influence in Mixed Maltese English and the following are some examples from classroom talk:

tistorja	/tisto:rja/	*she stores*
tistreccja	/tistretʃja/	*she stretches*
tiddrajklinja	/tid:rajkl^{j}nja/	*to dry clean*
nibblicjaha	/nib:l^{j}ʧja:/	*I bleach it*

(c,e) Tag-switching

Poplack (1980) speaks about the insertion of a tag in one language which is otherwise entirely in the other language. Tag-switching can occur either in Maltese or English utterances as in:

Teacher: it's a little spec, tara? *(can you see?)*

Teacher: kif rajniha l-bierah, right? *(as we saw it yesterday, right?).*

Teacher: bhal din, right? *(like this one, right?).*

(d) Code-switching

Gumperz (1982) speaks about conversational code-switching. This, unlike situational code-switching, which is more like diglossia, takes place in a situation where there is no change in situation or topic but there is a change in code. Conversational code-switching can be further subdivided according to Poplack's (1980) categories of intrasentential and intersentential code-switching.

Intrasentential code-switching of different types occurs within the clause or sentence boundary (as in tag-switching for example); while intersentential code-switching involves a switch at a clause or sentence boundary or when speakers take turns. Examples of intrasentential code-switching in Maltese:

Teacher: that changed food ikun jista' jghaddi mit-tube ghac-cells
(will be able to pass from the tube to the cells).

Teacher: il-hwejjeg li ghandhom il-kulur fihom you can't bleach
(coloured clothes can't be bleached).

Examples of *intersentential switching*:

Teacher: we have substances going in and out issa ha naraw minn fejn sa jidhlu
(now let us see where they get in from);

Teacher: basta jkollok two sides u included angle
(as long as you have two sides and included angle).

Teacher: there are these two symbols ghandkom ideja ghal x'hiex inhuma?
(have you any idea what they mean?).

and in turn taking:

Teacher A: ma qallek xejn tajjeb jew hazin?
(didn't he tell you anything whether it was right or wrong?)

Teacher B: he didn't say anything, nothing;

Student: and an angle

Teacher: eh mela mhux and an angle
(no of course not and an angle).

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Blom and Gumperz (1971) describe an instance of metaphorical code-switching when a variety normally used in one kind of situation is used in a different kind because the topic is the sort which would normally arise in the first kind of situation, as for example, when someone is speaking in Maltese and then quotes what somebody else has said in English and actually says it in English. There are examples of this from Mixed Maltese English but no examples have as yet come up in classroom data. An example from a non-classroom situation is the following:

Speaker: Imbaghad qalli "Edinburgh is a very good University" *(then he told me ...).*

4.2 Maltese influence on English

(f) Grammar

From the limited amount of data of Maltese English (as opposed to Mixed Maltese English) collected from classrooms there are no examples of Maltese grammatical influence on English. However I present the following instances of spoken Maltese English as documented by Navarro and Grech (1984) as examples of this category;

- omission of the negative, as in *Mind you cut your foot on the rocks* (Maltese: Ara taqta' saqajk)
- pronoun precedes verb, as in *Try you* (Maltese: Ipprova int)
- intensifying an intensifier, as in *This steak is much more better than the one I ate yesterday* (Maltese: Dan l-istejk hafna ahjar milli kilt il-bierah)

Navarro and Grech (1984) also give some examples of lexical choice deviance as in *Don't stand in the middle* for "Don't stay in the way" (Maltese: Toqoghdx fin-nofs) and the omission of DO-support, as in *You want ice-cream?* (Maltese: Trid gelat?). Such examples, they comment, are prominent features of Maltese English.

(g) Phonology

1. A phonetic distinction made in Standard English (SE) which is conspicuously absent in Maltese-English (ME) is that of the environmentally conditioned 'dark l' as for example at the end of the word *lull* as opposed to the 'clear l' at the beginning of the word *lip*. The phoneme /l/ is indiscriminately realized as [l] in ME and never as [ɬ]. (Vella, 1991 personal communication).
2. Voicing distinctions made in SE may also differ slightly in ME. Maltese devoices obstruents word-finally. It is therefore highly likely that ME may be characterized by non-standard patterns of voicing and instances of word-final devoicing especially may frequently be noted.
3. Maltese speakers substitute the dental/alveolar stops /t/ and /d/ for the fricatives /θ/ and /ð/.
4. Centralized vowels do not have phonemic status in Maltese and this could account for the fact that the renditions of central vowels of ME would be peripheralized; /ɑ/ being given an articulation more appropriate for SE [ə] and [ʌ].
5. Where vowel reduction occurs, it seems to be much more restricted in ME than it would be in SE, and there seems to be a tendency in ME not to reduce vowels, even when these occur in what would be unstressed positions. This has implications

for the rhythm of ME as compared with the rhythm of SE (see also Vella 1988). Calleja (1987: 113) outlines three related features that characterize ME in this sense:

i. the occurrence of vowels of same quality in both stressed and unstressed positions;
ii. the increased number of stressed syllables and therefore of feet in the utterance;
iii. the increased number of tonic stresses and, hence, of tone groups.

5 Implications

The implications that emerge from this intense crosslinguistic influence are relevant both to language teaching practice as well as to language planning in education, and include the following:

- To what extent should features of crosslinguistic influence be corrected in (i) spoken and (ii) written language produced by students in both Maltese and English?
- Which model of each language is more appropriate in such a situation, e.g. Maltese English or British English?
- If Maltese English is really set as a target, in what ways would this affect English language proficiency in the future?
- How important is international intelligibility in a tourist island like Malta and what effects would the promotion of Maltese English have in this case?
- What effect does crosslinguistic influence have on the pupils' proficiency in both Maltese and English?
- To what extent can/should the Maltese language be allowed to assimilate English items?
- Should a policy be set up to determine which language should be used during which lessons?

This brief description of Mixed Maltese English suggests a need for a more detailed functional analysis of mixed speech as a medium of instruction. There are various perspectives from which the transcript data could be studied, e.g. from a classroom process point of view to discover the pedagogical functions of mixed speech; linguistically, to analyze crosslinguistic influence at morphological and syntactic levels; and more generally, to find out about the macro-sociolinguistic meaning of the use of Mixed Maltese English as a medium of instruction.

Notes

1. Symbols used in the transcript:

T	=	teacher	.	=	pause of less than 2 seconds
P	=	pupil	+	=	pause of 2-3 seconds
Ps	=	pupils	+ +	=	pause of more than 3 seconds

2. The examples of assimilation and inflectional morphology take the form: Maltese spelling; phonemic transcription between obliques; and English spelling in italics.

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